The Diamond Sutra

Winter Retreat 1997/98 Thursday 4 December 1997

Dear friends, today is the 4 of December 1997, we are in the New Hamlet in the Winter Retreat. Last time we had begun to study the Diamond Sutra, and we heard the Venerable Subhuti's question as well as the Buddha’s answer. This question is a very practical one. Sometimes people ask very theoretical questions which don't relate to the practice in our daily life. Most people have the tendency to be very theoretical whilst Venerable Subhuti’s question is very practical. He asked, "If sons and daughters of good families want to realise the most noble aspiration, what should they rely on and what should they do in order to master their thinking?" Again a very practical question.

Before asking the question the Venerable Subhuti gave an observation, saying the Buddha is someone very rare to find because he especially supports and shows great confidence in the bodhisattvas. That is a very important observation. The last time we defined a bodhisattva as someone who has a strong desire and great vow to attempt to relieve the suffering of all beings and to try to bring all beings to the other shore, the shore of liberation, of emancipation. Therefore in the mind and heart of the bodhisattvas there must exist a great energy called Bodhicitta, and because of that energy the Buddha especially gives his support to the bodhisattvas, This is a matter of investments. For example when we have ten acres, five of which have the best soil, we have to use all of our energy to cultivate those five acres first. If we have time, good seeds, good fertiliser then we have to put all these resources and our energy into those five acres first, because those five acres will give us a good harvest. If we put all our energy, time, fertiliser and seeds into the other five acres in which the soil is not so good, then we will not have as abundant a harvest. This is only a matter of using our intelligence and not an issue of discrimination. Therefore the World Honoured One always sets aside time and energy to support those great beings who have a great vow and a great desire. Because if someone has a great aspiration, they can help many people. There is no discrimination only intelligent investing.

If we look in our life we will see the same thing. There are monks and nuns who have great bodhicitta, who have a great desire, great ambition to help other people and do not just think about their future or their own comfort. Those people will get greater support from the sangha and from the teacher, more than the people who just think about their own comfort in their daily life or their own future. And the question of Venerable Subhuti started with that observation. It is a very intelligent observation and a very intelligent question. This student appreciates the teacher, can see the heart and mind of the teacher, and see the value of the teacher’s insights. When the World Honoured One replied, he answered directly and said that the authentic bodhisattva is a bodhisattva who embodies two factors in his being: the first factor is the great desire, great ambition, to bring all beings to the shore of liberation. This is called bodhicitta, but having a great aspiration is not enough to be called an authentic bodhisattva. The second thing we have to have is the wisdom of non-discrimination.

The wisdom of non-discrimination is the wisdom that can break the barrier of individualism, with this wisdom we can see that we are the other person and the other person is ourself. The happiness of the other person is our own happiness, and our own happiness is the happiness of the other people, other beings, of plants, animals, and minerals. Sometimes we call it the wisdom of equanimity. 'Samatha' means non-discrimination. The word is different from 'Samatha', the word for stopping. Samatajnana, the wisdom of non-discrimination, means that between the other person and ourself there is no difference. This entity is not completely different from the other entity, and we are all connected to each other and make up one another.

According to Buddhist psychology there are eight consciousnesses. First is the store consciousness, next is manas, and then there is mind consciousness. The five others are based on our five senses: they are sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. The nature of the manas consciousness is discrimination. Manas embraces the store consciousness and calls it 'myself'; it discriminates the self and the non-self. The origin of all discrimination and suffering comes from manas and the fact that our mind consciousness is in turn based on manas consciousness. When we practise we use the mind consciousness and store consciousness to look deeply and to understand the relationship, the connection of all dharmas, their non-self nature. And therefore gradually the manas consciousness is transformed. When we attain final enlightenment, complete liberation, manas consciousness becomes the 'wisdom of non-discrimination'. The purpose of our practice is to attain the wisdom of non-discrimination.

The Buddha said an authentic bodhisattva has to have two factors; first, the energy of bodhicitta and second, the wisdom of non-discrimination. The answer is very clear and direct. A bodhisattva, then, has to have a great vow to bring all the beings to the other shore. "And when all this innumerable, immeasurable, infinite number of beings have become liberated, we do not in truth, think that a single being has been liberated." So there is no one who is liberated, and no one who brings the beings to the other shore. The Buddha has already answered the question of the Venerable Subhuti, but also questioned the Venerable Subhuti and asked "why?" Then the Buddha continued: "If, Subhuti, a bodhisattva holds onto the idea that a self, a person, a living being, a life span exists, that person is not an authentic bodhisattva." And that person doesn't have the wisdom of non-discrimination. The essence of the Diamond Sutra is in this sentence. If we can understand this sentence then the other parts of the sutra are very easy to understand, we can understand the meaning of Diamond Sutra as easily as splitting bamboo.

When we split bamboo, it's only difficult at first because we have to cut through the hard part called ‘the eye’. But once we've cut through it then the rest of the bamboo can be split easily. The monks and nuns who have grown up in the West may not so easily understand the saying: "as easy as splitting bamboo". Once you've penetrated the hard part and there is a crack it's very easy to split the whole length of bamboo, through all the sections. So the Diamond Sutra is exactly the same. If we can understand the first part of the sutra then we can understand the other parts easily.

"Subhuti, if a bodhisattva holds onto the idea of a self, a person, a living being, a life span, that person is not an authentic bodhisattva." The sutra mentions four notions we have to clearly understand. We have the notions of self, person, living being, and life span. If we can overcome those four notions then we are an authentic bodhisattva. 'Samjna' means perception, idea, notion or concept. If we look at the Chinese character of the word 'notion', we see there are two parts: the upper part means ‘appearance’ or ‘mark’ and the lower part means mind. In our mind there is a mark and we catch that mark, that appearance. The two Chinese characters for ‘mark’ and ‘perception’ are closely connected because ‘mark’ is the object of ‘perception, and ‘perception’ in turn is the subject of ‘mark’, so we have a ‘perception’ when our mind is grasping a ‘mark’. The first part is 'laksana', object of mind, and the second part is 'citta', mind. When those two are combined we have the word 'Samjna', which means perception, idea, notion, concept. This sutra mentions four marks in which we are caught. And if we cannot liberate ourself from those four notions then we are not an authentic bodhisattva.

For example if we look at this marker pen. In our mind there is an appearance, a mark. Our mind catches this appearance and we have an idea, a perception about it. Our perception of the marker cannot be separated from its mark and vice versa. The subject and the object, depend on each other to co-exist. One makes the other and is made by the other. The marks cause us to have concepts, notions, and perceptions about them. This means that appearance helps the mind to form a notion, a perception, and the mind catches the appearance, the mark to make a notion, a concept. So both are responsible. But usually our perceptions, our notions, are wrong perceptions, wrong notions. For example there are two young people who fall in love when they first meet. The foundation of their love is their perceptions, their notions. When one sees the other they see some appearance of the other. And our loving mind is then created with the help of the appearance of the other. This loving mind grasps at the appearances to form a notion, a perception about the other person. And the object of our love is the appearance of the other person, which we

have created in our mind.

To help us understand this easily we draw a circle which represents reality, suchness, the thing in itself, and we will call it "X". So this reality, suchness, and this other circle "M", is our mind. Our mind looks at this suchness, at the thing in itself, and it cannot understand the true nature of the whole thing, so instead it creates an image of it. So, in our mind we create the image x', and x' is not x. It is our perception that our mind has about x. So when we love someone, we may not love that person, but we love the image our mind has created of that person. And after living together for three years we see that what we loved in the beginning is not the reality now. So the object of our perception is the appearance, and not the thing in itself, it is not the suchness of that thing. If our perception, our notion, is wrong, it is due to our mind having much greed, anger, and ignorance. Since it is the mind of discrimination it is the mind of ignorance. Therefore when we get in contact with something we cannot see it’s real nature and we simply create an image about that thing. So when we are angry or upset, we are upset about our own image of it and not the real thing. Our mind is responsible for the image x'. And x' is also responsible for our mind’s tendency to grasp.

Our deluded mind (t') comes from true mind (t). Deluded mind is based on true mind, exactly as x', our grasped appearance about something, is based on the reality of the thing x. If our true mind can be in contact with suchness then we are a bodhisattva, a fully awakened person. But most of the time the deluded mind is in contact with the appearance in our mind, creating wrong perception. The nature of the appearance and the perception is ignorance, avidya. Avidya is ignorance or delusion. Our mind is deluded mind, because in it there is the element of ignorance, of delusion. Vidya means light, and a-vidya means lacking light. If the subject is deluded, then the object is also distorted, and thus creates a wrong perception. For example with a fearful panicking mind we can easily mistake a rope for a snake.

In a mind based on ignorance and delusion many afflictions manifest. The two basic afflictions are craving (greed) and anger. Those two afflictions have their basis in our ignorance, our delusion, our deluded mind together with the mistaken image we have in our mind. The image we have is the object of our deluded mind. The perceived and the perceiver. The perception is generally a wrong perception. Because it's a wrong perception we use the word 'concept'. If it were not a wrong perception then we would call it ‘wisdom’ or ‘true reality’. If we have a perception, that perception, that notion can make us suffer. So it's much better if we don't have any notion, any perception. Some perceptions, some notions can make us suffer day and night. If we have a perception, a notion about something then we cannot have peace when we walk, we eat, we rest. And we suffer. The perception, the notion we have about something creates a craving, a desire in ourself, or anger in ourself. And when we have craving or anger, then we lose our peace and joy. Besides greed and anger we also have arrogance, doubt, jealousy, prejudice etc. So the deluded mind is the origin of all these afflictions. For example we have a perception that: "If I can do this I will be very happy." If we have that perception, that idea, then we lose our peace. We work very hard in order to get that, but if the conditions don't allow us to fulfil that dream, that idea, then we suffer. When we practise we can understand the true nature of our deluded mind so that we can liberate ourself from our suffering

The World Honoured One didn't talk about many notions, only four. And if we can destroy those four notions then we can attain the wisdom of non-discrimination and we are an authentic bodhisattva. The first notion is the "self". We should understand that the foundation of Buddhism is the wisdom of non-self. Last time, we looked at the wisdom of non-self by looking at the right hand and the left hand. The right hand writes poems and Chinese characters, but it never compares itself with the left hand, and it is never jealous or angry or discriminating against the left hand, because in the right hand there is the wisdom of non-discrimination. So we practise in order to be like the right hand, nothing more than that. And then we will not discriminate self from not self, we won't be thinking there is someone higher or better than we are. We think that we are looking for something outside ourself, but the wisdom of non-discrimination is already there in our right hand.

Self, what is it? It is our imagining, the creation of our deluded mind. Therefore the Buddha has taught us to meditate about the nature of non-self. When we look at a leaf or a pebble, a cloud, a river or a baby, a society or a human being, we look deeply in order to understand the nature of non-self, so that we can liberate ourself from the notion of self. For example when father and son are angry at each other, they are able to be angry because the father thinks: "My son is not me", and the son thinks the same way: "My father is not me." But if they both understand that they are both the same entity, the same reality, then it is impossible to get angry with each other, because they are not caught by the idea of self. The practice for monks and nuns is the same. We have a saying: "Brothers and sisters are like hands an feet of a body." Elder brother gets angry with younger brother because he is still caught by a notion of self. When we are liberated from that notion of self then we will not be angry and we can laugh, we can smile. Even if only one of us can liberate ourself from the notion of self then we will not be upset by other people, it won't matter what the other person does or what the other person says, and gradually the other person will change himself or herself.

The same is true with the any religions, for example; Christianity and Buddhism. In the last century Catholic priests and nuns came to Asian countries. Some of the Buddhists were still caught by the notion of self and were very angry. They thought: "We have our own religion, you don't need to come here." Both sides have a notion about their own religion having the nature of a separate self. The same thing happens now. Some people say: "Why do you bring Buddhism to the West?" They feel they have to defend themselves. Because most of us are still caught by the notion of self. But Buddhism is made only of non-Buddhism elements. If we look deeply we can see that the elements of non-Buddhism have made Buddhism. For example Siddhartha himself, or the great disciples Sariputra, Mollagana, Anathapindika; they weren't Buddhists. So Buddhism is made by non-Buddhism elements. It's exactly the same as a flower. A flower is made from non-flower elements; the sun, the clouds are not flower, soil is not flower, water is not flower. The self is made of non-self elements. It is the same with the other religions. When you look at Christianity it's also made by non-Christian elements. When you can see that then you realise the wisdom of non-self and there is no discrimination between the self and non-self. Mango is different than grapefruit, the Venerable Mahakasyapa is different from the Venerable Ananda. We can distinguish the differences but we don't have any discrimination, and then we liberate ourself because we are not caught by the appearance, the notion of self.

The World Honoured One is the liberated one because he is not caught in the notion of self. But although he is completely liberated he still uses the language of a human being. He said: "Ananda, that hill is so beautiful, do you want to climb up there with me?" So when the Buddha talks he says "self", "I", "the hill", "Ananda". Ananda is Ananda, the hill is the hill, the Buddha is Buddha, but although he uses those words he doesn't discriminate these are separate entities, and therefore he is able to have freedom, because he has the wisdom of non-discrimination. Just so, when we are the younger brother we are still the younger brother, and when we are the elder brother we are still the elder brother, but it doesn't mean that we are two separate entities, two separate realities. If we are angry, jealous, or upset with our brother, it is because we have the notion of self. But if we look at the person and we are not caught in any appearance, then we understand the non-self in the self and we are liberated. It is not a matter of destroying all appearances; appearances are still there. The key is for us not to be deceived thinking that each is a separate entity. It is only a matter of how we look at everything. In the Diamond Sutra there is a famous sentence: "If you can see the no-mark nature in the mark, then you see the Tathagata." If we understand the nature of non-self then we can see the true nature of big brother, big sister, Ananda. They are all there, they are all different. But if when we look at them we don't see the separate self of those entities, then we are the Buddha.

There is a barrier between self and non-self that is created by deluded mind. The key is how to remove that barrier between the self and non-self. At the beginning we say that the self is not non-self, I am not you. But when you look deeply you see that I am made by other elements other than me. I am made by you, and in me I can see you. When we look deeply in the flower we can see the clouds, the sunlight, and other non-flower elements. We need to remove that barrier. And when we have removed it, the self is the non-self. We see self is made by the non-self elements, that the self is non-self.

We have a principle of identity. According to this principle: A=A

A is A, A cannot be B: A#B

A cannot be B, C, D: A#B,C,D

But in the wisdom of the Diamond Sutra A can be B: A=B

Because the self is made by non-self elements.

And the mathematical formula is: A#A=A

Meaning A is made of what is not A, therefore A is truly A.

In the Diamond Sutra there are many sentences which are written according to this formula (A#A=A).

It means that the self is the non-self: self=non-self=self

When we understand that the self is made by the non-self elements then we see the reality, the true nature of the self. In exactly the same way, if A is the bodhisattva who brings all the beings to the other shore, and if the bodhisattva still thinks that he is a bodhisattva, then he is not an authentic bodhisattva. But if we look at A and we can see non-A elements in it then it is truly A, then the bodhisattva is truly an authentic bodhisattva. If the flower is A, and we think that the flower is separate from the other things (a flower is not a cloud, is not sun, is not fertiliser), if we see the flower that way then it is not yet a true flower. But if looking deeply in the flower you can see that the flower is made by non-flower elements, we can see the elements B,C,D, then A is true A, the flower is a true flower.

Usually we use the example of the garbage and flower. Looking deeply in the flower we see garbage. Most of us think that a flower is a flower, garbage is garbage. But when we look deeply in the flower we see that garbage is a very important element in the flower, and then the flower is also the garbage. A is also B,C,D. When we can see that then we can see the true nature of everything. So that is the formula according to the sutra:

A is not the A that we have thought it is: A#A

but A is also non-A: A=B,C,D

Therefore A is true A: A=A

A is not the A that we have thought it is, but it is also non-A. Therefore it is true A. Or another way to say it is when we look deeply in A and we can see that our notion about A is a wrong notion, a wrong perception, then at that time we start to understand the true nature of A. (If you understand so far put your hand up!)

This formula is similar to the second formula, A=B,C,D. I am the other. Usually we think that A is not B,C,D. But when we can see that A is made by B,C,D, that A is also B,C,D, then we can understand the true nature of A, the suchness of A. Therefore in order to realise the meaning of the Diamond Sutra we need to destroy the wrong notion about self. Then we can realise the wisdom of non-discrimination, the wisdom of non-self. Non-self is the key.

'Self' is a notion, a perception, an idea. But if we get rid of that notion only to be caught by another notion, the notion of 'non-self', then we are in exactly the same dilemma. Therefore according to the Diamond Sutra we have to overcome all the notions. The teaching of non-self is offered to help us overcome the notion of self, but when we can get rid of the notion of self then we also have to get rid of the notion of non-self. Non-self is not a concept, it's a method, a means, a practise - the teaching of non-self is to help us to liberate ourselves from the notion of self. The self is made by the non-self. When we look deeply in the self, if we can see the non-self elements, then we can get in touch with the suchness of the self. And at that time we can use the word 'self', but without being caught by the notion of self.

Self is the first notion mentioned in the Diamond Sutra, and we need to practise in order to liberate ourself from this notion. How do we practise? When we eat, walk, sit, when we look at other people, at the clouds, the grass, then we can see ourselves; we can see that we are in those elements and we are not separate. And that is the meditation on non-self. Every time we cook, we cut carrots, we wash dishes, in those moments, that is the time for us to meditate. We need to understand the relationship between these things, and ourself and we need to see ourself in those things and to see those things in ourself. If we have anger or jealousy then we should look deeply in order to understand that the anger or jealousy originated from our notion of self. And if we can liberate ourself from that notion then we free ourself from anger, from jealousy. So this is the practice. It is not a theory. And this practice, the practice of meditation on non-self, needs to be practised every day, every moment of our daily life.

The second notion is person, man, human being. We have a notion, an idea about man, about person. Usually we forget that the human being is a creature that evolved from animals, plants and minerals. Scientists have proved clearly that person is made by non-person elements. The human being is the most recent creature in the evolution of life on earth. When we think that we have the right to do anything, and that others, plants, animals, minerals are the means for us to get what we want, then we have a very wrong notion about man. We haven't understood that man is made of non-man elements, that A is made of non-A, and therefore A is true A. We need to remove the barrier between human beings and the non-human elements. The non-man elements are the plants, animals and minerals.

I want to emphasise something. We have all learned that man is one of the animals, and is the latest creature in the evolution of nature on earth, and we know that we cannot survive without plants, without animals. We know this, but we don't remember all the time. And we continue to discriminate and to destroy the plants, the animals, and the minerals, (elements of our environment). Therefore in our daily life we need to practise in order to understand the relation between human and non-human. If we can protect the non-human elements then we protect ourself. The notion that man is the highest creature and that all the other elements are there to serve man is a very wrong idea. We have to understand that human is made by the non-human and we have a responsibility to protect the non-human elements. This is the wisdom we can attain when we meditate on non-self. With this wisdom we can save our environment and ourselves. 2600 years ago the Buddha realised this and taught us about it. So we can say that the Diamond Sutra is the oldest teaching about protecting the environment.

The third notion is living being. This is another notion we need to transform and liberate ourself from. We think that living beings have a life span, and have feelings, perceptions and so on and are different from non-living beings. The Buddha has taught us that living beings are made by non-living beings, for example by plants and minerals. Therefore, in our daily life, we need to live in such a way that nourishes that wisdom, to nourish our understanding about the relationship between living beings and non-living beings, that living beings are made by non-living beings. Living beings are not living beings, therefore the living being is a true living being. Self is non-self, so that self is a true self. Man is not man, then man is truly man. If we can understand that man is made by non-man elements then at that time we understand man as true man. In the same way, if we look at living beings and we see and understand that living beings are made by non-living beings, then we understand the suchness, the reality of living beings. Here we repeat the wisdom of the Diamond Sutra, it means when we look at a cup of tea, if we can see that the cup of tea is made by non-tea elements then we can see the suchness of that cup of tea.

The fourth notion is life span. We have a perception that our life span is 70, 80 or 100 years. We think we exist from the time we were born to the time we die, and that this is our life span. That is another notion, a perception, a concept that we need to overcome and liberate ourself from. According to that notion, before we are born we do not exist and after we die we are nothing. This is a very wrong notion. It is said in many sutras that when conditions are sufficient our body is formed, and when conditions

are not sufficient then our body does not manifest. We are caught by the idea of birth and death, the idea of existence and non-existence, and the idea of life span. The notion of life span is the basis of the notions of birth and death, coming and going, existence and non-existence, permanence and annihilation. All of these pairs of concepts have their foundation in the concept of life span. Therefore when we can destroy the notion of life span we can destroy the other notions.

The notions of permanence and annihilation are a contradictory pair of opposite notions. What is the belief of permanence? It is seeing that everything has an existence that never ceases. What is the opposite notion of annihilation? It is seeing that nothing exists. This is one pair of contradictory opposites. When we look deeply in all dharmas we see that everything changes, that everything has the nature of impermanence. But impermanence doesn't mean annihilation, so we have to liberate ourself from both notions of impermanence and annihilation, they are both erroneous. They both bring about suffering, fear, and anxiety. For example when we love someone, we think that that person will live with us for our whole life. We do not see his or her impermanent nature and when that person passes away we suffer, because we are caught by the notion of permanence. It is the same for ourselves. Now we are living, we exist, but one day we cannot exist anymore, we will die. We have a great fear of being cut off from life, a fear of nothingness. This is why the philosopher Descartes said: "I think therefore I am." We say it loud to overcome our fear. If we are caught in the notion of permanence or in its opposite, annihilation, then we suffer in both cases.

The same thing is true for the notions of existence and non-existence. Descartes said: "I think therefore I am." He was caught in a notion of existence, clinging to it to overcome the fear of non-existence. Because he did not look deeply enough, he was fearful of being nothing especially when he was confronted with the death of someone, or with his own death. If we are caught in the notion of being we will also be caught in the notion of non-being. From the perspective of life span, we think we start to exist at the point of time we call birth; and we think we continue to exist until the point of time we call death, after which we think we cease to exist. Thus the notions of birth and death form the basis of the notions of being and non-being. Both of these notions have their roots in the fundamental notion of life span. The Buddha has taught that when conditions are sufficient things manifest, but to label that manifestation as being is wrong. Also when conditions are not sufficient, things do not manifest, but to label that as non-being is also wrong. Reality is beyond being and non-being, we need to overcome those notions. Hamlet said: "To be or not to be, that is the question." We can see that he was caught by these notions. But according to this teaching, "to be or not to be", is not the question. Because reality is beyond the notion of being or non-being, birth or death, coming or going. Where do we come from and where do we go to? Those are philosophical questions. But if we understand suchness then we know that we don't come from anywhere and we don't go anywhere.

The Tathagata doesn't come from anywhere and he doesn't go anywhere. That is the definition of Tathagata. Therefore the Tathagata is called the Tathagata. So all the notions, the notions of coming, going; being, non-being; birth, death; permanence, annihilation, all have their origin in the fundamental notion of life span. Therefore in the Lotus Sutra we learn that the life span of the Buddha is infinite. Our life span is the same, and we are the future Buddha, and we have an infinite life span. We do not begin to exist at the point of birth and we do not cease to exist at the point of death. We overcome and go beyond the notion of life span as the time between when we are born and when we die. When we can see x as x, reality as reality, then we can overcome all the notions. When we do walking meditation in autumn we see dead leaves, and we have a feeling of sadness. We call them dead leaves instead of yellow or red leaves. But if we look deeply at those leaves we see that each is a manifestation that pretends to die, but actually the leaf is not dead. We are caught in the notion of being born and being dead; birth and death; being and non-being; where does it come from, where does it go to; permanence, annihilation. The true nature of a leaf also goes beyond all these eight notions. We are like the leaf. The leaf becomes the soil in order to later become another leaf or a flower. So if we can understand the leaf and go beyond these eight notions, then we can understand and can see the suchness of a leaf. To practice means to meditate so that we can see the suchness of a leaf, we can see the suchness of ourselves. We have to look deeply at being young and being old; at being born, dying; coming, going; being, non-being; and then all of our suffering, our afflictions will be transformed. Master Tang Hoi, a Vietnamese Zen patriarch who was born and lived in the third century, has taught us a way of meditating called, "Letting go of the notions of body and of life span", (Phong Khi Xu Mang). So when we say: "I have only one life to live", it's not correct because life is unlimited. I am my children, my children are me.

When the Venerable Subhuti heard these words he did not understand. Therefore he didn't cry yet. The Buddha had to explain a little bit more, then he understood. "Moreover, Subhuti, if a bodhisattva practises generosity, she does not rely on any object, that is to say does not rely on form, sound, smell, taste, touch or objects of mind to practise generosity. That, Subhuti, is the spirit in which a bodhisattva should practise generosity, not relying on signs. Why? If a bodhisattva practises generosity and does not rely on signs then the happiness that results from this virtue cannot be conceived of or measured." From talking about the four notions he moves on to talk about the practice of generosity. Why? Because the Buddha was talking about prajnaparamita as one of the six ways to cross over to the other shore, and another of these six ways is to practise generosity. The other practices are mindfulness trainings, diligence, inclusiveness, concentration and the last one is insight, prajnaparamita wisdom.

In the Diamond Sutra the Buddha talks about the practice of generosity because it is the first practice, so he uses it as an example for the other five practices. He mentions forbearance but he doesn't talk about the other practices. But the nature of all six practices is prajnaparamita wisdom. If you practise generosity without understanding, without prajnaparamita wisdom, then it is not the highest practice of generosity. If you practise generosity and are not caught by the four notions then it is the highest practice of generosity. It's the same with the other five practices. When we practise the six paramitas (generosity, mindfulness trainings, diligence, inclusiveness, meditation, insight) we need to maintain our understanding, our wisdom of non-discrimination. When we look at form we understand that form is made of non-form. When we look deeply at sound we have to understand deeply that sound is made by non-sound elements. The same for smell, taste, touch, and objects of mind. Therefore we are not caught by form, sound, smell, taste, touch or objects of mind. If we are not caught by these and we are using the wisdom of non-discrimination, then our acts of generosity have reached the highest peak of practice.

Many of us want to be social workers to help other people, to practise generosity, but we are caught by the four notions, therefore the happiness that results is not very great. We are still angry, sad, and we still suffer because we are still caught by the four notions of self, person, living being and life span. If we practise generosity according to the spirit of the Diamond Sutra, using the wisdom of non-discrimination as fuel for our practice, then the happiness that results from this virtue is the greatest.

This is a difficult concept, therefore we should discuss it in Dharma discussion. We need to understand these teachings are not theories. These teachings are our daily practice. How in our daily life can we apply the wisdom of non-discrimination? How can we not be caught by the four notions? Otherwise if we learn about the sutra but we cannot apply it in our daily life, then our learning will not help us.

(END)